

Sea Us Now Audio: See Us Now. A reimagining of our history with the coastline and the sea.

Martina Duran: As a woman, the ocean is calibrated with the moon, with the tides, and my body is calibrated with the moon, with my cycles. And there's this weird, beautiful otherworldly connection I have when I catch a really great wave, that I just kind of connect into that feminine aspect, energy of the water.

Shelby Stanger: You're hearing from Textured Waves, an incredible surf collective of women who aim to add more diversity to surfing and introduce more women of color to riding waves.

Sea Us Now Audio: We're reclaiming our place in the deep blue, building up the strength of the generations that came before us.

Sea Us Now Audio: This is a love letter to our past and our future.

Sea Us Now Audio: History's selective narrative does not dictate how we choose to see ourselves.

Sea Us Now Audio: We stand on the shoulders of water women who weren't afforded these opportunities. Telling our stories with each new day to see our healing connection. Defying gravity from our head to our toes.

Shelby Stanger: The cofounders of Textured Waves recently collaborated with the women's surf brand, Seea, to create a stunning four minute film called See Us Now. The film is absolutely beautiful. The film is absolutely beautiful. It reimagines vintage surf culture to include and highlight Black women, using imagery, music and poetic narrative.

\Today, I'm talking with some of the cofounders of Textured Waves; Chelsea Woody, Martina Duran, and Danielle Black Lyons, about making the film, how surfing has brought them together, diversity in surfing, and so much more.

Shelby Stanger: I'm Shelby Stanger, and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Shelby Stanger: The idea to make a project like See Us Now had been brewing in Chelsea Woody's mind for few years before it came to life. Before we get into the making of the film, I want to introduce you to Chelsea. She's one of the cofounders of Textured Waves and she's a total badass. All the women involved are. Chelsea works full time as a nurse, and she took up surfing later in life, while she and her husband were traveling.

Chelsea Woody: Well, I started surfing later in life at 30.

Shelby Stanger: Yeah!

Chelsea Woody: But yeah, me and my husband started surfing almost six years now, ago, in Indonesia. We'd been traveling for about a year and a half, took some time off of work. We actually were living in Seattle, quit our jobs, traveled around the world. And then on that trip, I was like, "I'm going to learn to surf." And so

actually on my 30th birthday, I was like, "I'm going to catch 30 waves," in Indonesia on this Island called Lombok.

Chelsea Woody: And I obviously wasn't catching green waves, but 30 waves on the whitewash, that was something to me. And I had been trying so hard to remember that day. I was like, "I'm going to catch 30 waves on my 30th birthday." And then I got out of the water and some people had been watching me, and I was so embarrassed. And they were like, "We wanted so bad for you to catch a wave." And I was like, "Wait, what?"

Chelsea Woody: I couldn't believe that people had been watching me struggle. You're just in this tunnel vision of just wanting to learn, right? Yeah, it just consumed me, and actually that made me mad. And I was like, "I'm going to learn how to do this."

Sea Us Now Audio: The ocean is our baptism. Healing waters root our purpose.

Shelby Stanger: When Chelsea got back to the USA, she found other women of color who surfed on Instagram. That eventually led to the start of Textured Waves. And two years after meeting online, Chelsea and her co founders of Textured Waves, then connected to the swimwear brand Seea, where they made their wild idea about this stunning film, a reality.

Shelby Stanger: See Us Now is shot with a vintage type filter, and it echoes the atmosphere of the 1960s. This was an era when Jim Crow laws prevented Black people from accessing public beaches in swimming areas. The film reimagines this history and focuses on what it would've been like if more Black women surfed in this era. With this project, the women of Textured Waves are reclaiming their relationship and history with the sea. Chelsea, can you tell us about how this film came together?

Chelsea Woody: The background to it is really a marriage of Black beach culture in the fifties and sixties, married to vintage surf culture. There's often this nostalgia about vintage surf culture and the vibe, and we see lots of folks emulating that now. And for African Americans and specifically African American females, this is just not something that we see in that history.

Chelsea Woody: Amanda from Seea reached out to us via Instagram and she really loved what we were up to. She wanted to figure out a way that we could work together. We were very intentional by just wanting to do something that was long lasting and that would make an impact on surf culture. We pitched this idea to her and she really loved it. Even when I was thinking of the storyline a few years ago, I actually had her brand in mind, so the universe kind of came together and the stars aligned and we were able to make this film.

Shelby Stanger: It's a beautiful film, and we'll definitely link to it in the show notes so every single person listening definitely needs to watch it, because it's stunning and you're all really good surfers. I love that it's history re-imagined, and I'd love for you to talk a little bit more about that.

Chelsea Woody: Yeah. We wanted to reimagine Black beach culture and our relationship with the sea. The whole idea was, we wanted it to captivate people and be a dreamlike state and have folks just imagining how beautiful this imagery is, beautiful of Black female surfers, beautiful example of women's empowerment, and what we as surfers can create for the future generations of surfing.

Shelby Stanger: I just thought it was so cool because you wouldn't see a group of, first, females, going to surf together like that in the fifties, let alone Black females together in the fifties. So for me, it was really powerful.

Chelsea Woody: We were really intentional to have a Black female director, which was Bethany Mollenkof, and she didn't do the in-water footage, but she did all of the lifestyle footage that you see, and us driving in the old Falcon, like on the sunny California coast. And we really wanted it to come from that perspective that the surf industry probably has not seen, and also Black culture. So we really wanted this lens to come from a woman in our community, but also bring a different, fresh perspective to surfing.

Shelby Stanger: I mean, it's not like you have the most fancy makeup or whatever. You were just you. I mean, it just looked beautiful. They're stunning images.

Chelsea Woody: Yeah. I think that was part of our whole goal too, as a collective. Even working with Amanda, we wanted to make sure we were displaying natural beauty and showing that we are all beautiful in the forms that we come in, and her suits... I'm plugging Seea, because we all wear them or wore them even prior to this shoot, and it all felt very comfortable and they fit us really nicely, and we could actually surf in them, and there were still fly. So we're still thinking about that too.

Chelsea Woody: So yeah, I think we really just wanted to show that, women, we don't have to change much about ourselves to be beautiful, and we can be in this space and celebrate each other, and celebrate different body types and different hair textures and all the diversity that comes with being a woman.

Shelby Stanger: Hair textures. Talk to me about hair textures and hair. I know that's a point in a lot of discussions. Did that inform part of the name Textured Waves?

Chelsea Woody: Yes. So Textured Waves was... We wanted to combine both our passion for wave riding and, as Black women, hair and texture and embracing our hair, it's a huge part of our culture. So we wanted to, again, marry those things. A lot of this is marrying these parts of ourselves that we don't see represented in the world, really. And we are these complex women that have different interests. Yeah, so that's part of where Textured Waves come from.

Chelsea Woody: We all come in these different textures and fabrics, but it also speaks to our hair texture in itself, right? We all have different hair textures and all of those things should be embraced. We don't value just one, and that's a part of just accepting yourself as a person of color, or a woman, even. Just basically a woman, just accepting how you are.

Sea Us Now Audio: Renewed to our natural state, we are in sync with nature.

Shelby Stanger: The film did an incredible job capturing the feeling of joy through each member of Textured Waves. For Danielle Black Lyons, rediscovering and celebrating joy has been an essential part of being a surfer.

Danielle Black Lyons: When we moved back from London and I'd had my son, I was suffering from some postpartum depression. I didn't even know I had it until I was in it and people were just like, "Are you sad? Are you okay?" I'm like, "I think I'm sad. I don't even know." It was one of those things where I had lost so much of my identity in myself becoming a mother, I had to reinvent myself. And getting back into the water, that's where I found my soul again.

Danielle Black Lyons: You know, it brought me back to me and who I was and who I've become today. It's so healing for me. It's so necessary for my mental health. My family really knows that about me, and they give me the space every day to go out and find myself again and be the good mother that I need to be and the good wife that I need to be for them. So it's my mantra to surf every morning and find myself again.

Sea Us Now Audio: Immersed in seasteerhood, this bond can be felt across oceans.

Shelby Stanger: So when you all film together, you have complete creative control over this film. When I watch it, there is just so much joy during the filming, especially while you're surfing.

Danielle Black Lyons: And that was the purpose of the film, too. We were intentional about not focusing on segregation and kind of the more unsavory parts of those times. We wanted to flip it on its head and focus on the joy, really zone in on Black joy and what that means to be a water woman, and to be a Black female water woman.

Danielle Black Lyons: You know, I think that all of us, when we're together in the lineup, even the first time that we surfed together, there was just this automatic kinship and sisterhood, because when you're surfing with women, it's amazing in itself, right? Like if it's a full, all-women lineup, you get that sensation and you're tingling, and you're vibey and you're happy. And then when you're surfing with women of color who look like you and you never get that, it's such a special thing. I think that we feed off each other's energy and happiness, and we're all just in this zone of just... We're floating around with a bunch of other Black unicorns. It's amazing. We're so rare.

Shelby Stanger: There've been a lot of barriers that have kept Black women and women of color from surfing. When we come back, Textured Waves co-founders Danielle Black Lyons and Martina Duran talk about why representation in surfing matters, and what Textured Waves is doing to make surfing more accessible to Black women and people of color.

Sea Us Now Audio: We're reclaiming our place in deep blue, building up the strength of the generations that came before us.

- Shelby Stanger: Chelsea Woody, Danielle Black Lyons and Martina Duran amaze me. Not only are they all bad asses and surfers who run Textured Waves in their spare time, but they all bought their first surf boards and became surfers later in life as adults. Maybe if there had been more Black women surfers for them to look up to, they would have started earlier.
- Danielle Black Lyons: I think for all of us, growing up, we didn't see images of hardly any women in surfing, and then we saw zero images of Black women. So that's probably why we all came to surfing a bit later in life. I think all of us probably had an epiphany with Blue Crush and seeing Michelle Rodriguez, and at least she was a woman of color. And we were just like, yay. You know, some representation. Still not us, but a person of color.
- Danielle Black Lyons: I think just having that imagery is so important. We would see images of... For me, gymnastics was really big back in the eighties and nineties. You'd see the gymnast, Dominique Dawes, was who I looked up to at the time, you'd see track and field stars that were incredible Black women that were strong.
- Danielle Black Lyons: And you'd see people that were in these spaces that our culture and community was accepting of, but nothing counterculture, like you would see it in swimming. There was no Simone Manuel back then. You wouldn't see prima ballerinas like we see now. It's so important to see women of color and women that look like you, when you're young, so that you know what's possible for yourself.
- Danielle Black Lyons: If you can't see it, you can't be it. I think it's incredibly important to see those visions and those visual references, so that you can have something to strive to. 'Cause I didn't know at that time, like when I was nine or 10, I was doing swim team and I was really good, and I did it all the way through college, but again, there was no Simone Manuel. I didn't know Black people could be Olympians, and I was too late by then.
- Danielle Black Lyons: So I just didn't have those references. I think had I seen someone who looked like me, maybe I would have tried harder to achieve something else. I didn't know it was possible. Same thing with surfing. I think that's why we're putting these images out there. We're trying to make sure young girls and women see that it's never too late. Impossible is nothing. You can do anything. You just sometimes need a little nudge or a little inspiration or a visual reference to make sure that it's attainable.
- Sea Us Now Audio: This is the path of our own creation. Our representation lies in our own hands.
- Shelby Stanger: Textured Waves is that inspiration and representation for other Black women and girls. Despite being spread across the country, the cofounders have created a community to motivate each other, to keep riding the waves, even if they're the only women of color in the lineup. For those of you who aren't surfers, the lineup is where we all sit to catch waves. Martina Duran is one of the cofounders of Textured Waves, who happens to be based in Hawaii. Martina started surfing in college when she was studying abroad in Costa Rica. But when she returned to Florida, she found that the surf community was a lot less diverse.

Martina Duran: When I saw the image of either Danielle or Gigi or Chelsea out there on a surfboard, shredding, I'm like, "Oh my God, they do exist." And there's just this whole layer, I think, of surfing as a woman of color. And that layer involves our hair care, our skin care, our body types, how we're treated in the lineup, how we are maybe mistreated in the lineup.

Martina Duran: How do you navigate that? Right? Because there's a lot of resources, I think, for women navigating male lineups, but there's no resources for being a woman of color, navigating an all white lineup, that may be not as welcoming to people of color. I just would like to say, I live in Hawaii now, but I'm actually from Florida, and that's where I began to surf, and that's where I kind of grew my surfing skills. Florida is still a part of the South. I distinctly remember paddling to line ups, and guys out there and the entire Confederate flag was their surfboard. That's a common thing. This is Florida, it's the South.

Martina Duran: Pulling up to breaks where the break may be a little bit more hidden, so you're kind of in these smaller communities, smaller towns, and pulling up alongside guys with huge pickup trucks with Confederate flags and surfboards and things. There's a lot to navigate. So for me, and this is speaking on my experiences as a surfer who has surfed mostly in the South, in the Southern United States, it was really refreshing and welcoming, I think, to see other people of color surfing, 'cause there's a lot of times I know that I've questioned. I'm like, "Do I belong here? Is this my space? Is this something I should be doing?" But that's my experience.

Shelby Stanger: I appreciate you sharing that. So what's your experience like now, in Hawaii?

Martina Duran: Hawaii, it's so interesting because the lineups are as diverse as the community. Right? One thing I noticed growing up in Florida, you would be on the beach. It was very diverse. You had Blacks, whites, Spanish, but the minute you cross into the water, into the aquatic space, into the surfing, there was this... Something was happening, right, where only a certain group of those people went out and they were surfing. And the beautiful thing about here in Hawaii, you don't see that. The diversity you see on the coast and on the land is reflected in the lineups here.

Martina Duran: In the sun, our skin develops. In the water, we see our hair blossom.

Shelby Stanger: Martina has also been involved in activism for making beach access and swimming more accessible to people of color. She's a member of the SurfRider Foundation, an activist foundation dedicated to protecting our oceans and the beach for everyone, and her passion behind this work is powerful.

Shelby Stanger: I'm wondering if you could just talk a little bit about beach access and how we can all work together to make surfing more accessible?

Martina Duran: Well, yeah, that's a huge problem. You know, one issue that we tackle a lot is just what you're speaking on, is the privatizing of our coastline. I'm very fortunate in Hawaii, we don't have that. There's no such thing as a private beach in Hawaii, the coast is for everyone. And you see what that's done to the surf culture and

the water culture here. It's very inclusive, right? Being in Florida, Florida has some problems with private beach access.

Martina Duran: In the state of Florida, you'll have miles of coastline that are inaccessible to the people who live in those nearby communities, unless you own a home on that beach. And then you'll have one access point every like five or six miles. That's a problem on a lot of different levels, but also because we all pay taxes to maintain those coastlines, right?

Martina Duran: So you're paying for something that you aren't allowed to have, because you don't have maybe enough money to afford property on the water. That is a huge problem because what happens is the only beach you can access will be the one public beach, every five or 10 miles. What happens is you have a lot of crowding and density on that one beach. People cannot spread out. So that is a very, very huge problem in the United States.

Martina Duran: Another place I like to surf a lot is Barbados, and Barbados also has amazing laws. They are not allowed to have private beaches on the island of Barbados as well. And you have this great inclusive aquatic culture because of that. So it's a problem on the mainland. It's a huge problem on the mainland United States. And sometimes, as we know, waves don't follow the laws of the United States, right?

Martina Duran: The ocean is its own entity. So sometimes, the areas where it's private are the areas maybe where there is waves or consistent waves, and then you'll have these spots which become localized, if you will. But then, where does the history of that localism lay, right? It usually lays in some form of racism, right? Segregation. It was only the sixties... I mean, my grandmother was alive during a time where she would have been arrested for stepping on a beach. These spots that then have become localized, well, what allowed you to localize the spot? It was because my people were legally not allowed to be here. They weren't allowed to own property here. So of course it turns into localism.

Shelby Stanger: If you go to Orange County where I spent a lot of time working in the surf industry, a lot of those beaches are completely private. You're right. And they're great beaches, beautiful beaches. This is something I'm really interested in. I'm wondering, what are ways, since you're a part of SurfRider, that people can change this besides bringing awareness to it? What have you learned? 'Cause I don't know.

Martina Duran: The way the laws work in states and local municipalities, it's so kind of convoluted, sometimes, that the best thing to do is reach out to your local SurfRider chapter and see what initiatives they already have going on, to start opening up the beach in their own communities, 'cause I guarantee you that most chapters have something going on to lobby their government.

Martina Duran: I know our chapter here in Oahu is always in the state Capitol, always lobbying, always testifying. It takes a lot of that groundwork. And then raising awareness in your community too. I think a lot of people don't realize how much of their

tax money does go into maintaining these coasts that they don't have access to. You know what I mean? So I think if people were more informed on that, it's like, "Listen, you pay for this, but you can't enjoy this."

Martina Duran: That's not very fair. You know, education is key, I think, in that aspect. Your community pools, local pools, Black children are five times more likely to drown than white children. A lot of that is because they don't have access to swimming classes or safety classes. A lot of times, those classes happen in community funded pools, and I think during the seventies, there was a huge defunding of public pools.

Martina Duran: What was happening was, you had a lot of these country clubs coming up and building their own pools. It was a way that they were able to still segregate, when integration was happening, when Blacks were allowed to use community pools and swim in the same spaces that whites were allowed. What happened following that is, you saw a lot of white communities then building their own pools and making it very community specific, and then what that ended up leading to is a defunding of lot of these pools and closures of these pools. So you have a lot of these dry islands, right, where these kids in these communities have no access to the beach because the beach is private. And then also, their local community pool is now closed and not funded.

Shelby Stanger: Getting involved in trying to fund local community pools in places where there are not community pools, I think is a huge initiative. And I think that's an initiative I'm going to take up. So thank you for bringing that to our attention.

Sea Us Now Audio: May future generations imaginatively decide their own narrative. May the waters of change greet us all.

Shelby Stanger: All right. So what is next for Textured Waves?

Martina Duran: I think we want to put out there what is not being put out there, and we're not going to wait for the surf industry to do it. We do want to see a full length film produced, featuring people of color surfing from all around the globe and from all corners of the world, from maybe all stages of their surfing journey. We want something that we can put out that's aspirational. I know we all as surfers have that surf film that we go back to constantly, and we want to make that film for the next generation of person of color surfers.

Sea Us Now Audio: May you see us now.

Shelby Stanger: Young surfers, Black surfers, women surfers, surfers of all shapes and sizes, they need to see themselves out there getting stoked out of their minds and experiencing the pure bliss and joy of riding waves. Chelsea, Danielle, and Martina's mission to diversify the surf is one I really admire and I can't wait to see what they do next.

Shelby Stanger: I want to give a huge thank you to Chelsea, Danielle and Martina for talking with me. I'm so excited you exist. Thank you so much for the work you do, not just for the surf industry, but also for the world. I totally believe surfing changes people,

and we need more people surfing, and more diverse and inclusive spaces, including in the ocean.

Shelby Stanger: Be sure to check out Textured Waves, to learn more about what they're up to and their upcoming retreats. You can find them on their website at texturedwaves.com, or on Facebook and Instagram @texturedwaves. And seriously, if you haven't seen See Us Now, go watch it. There's a link in the show notes rei.com/wildideasworthliving. Special thanks also to See Us Now filmmaker, Bethany Mollenkof, and the crew at Seea for letting us use this film in the show.

Shelby Stanger: Wild Ideas Worth Living is part of the REI podcast network. It's hosted by me, Shelby Stanger, written and edited by Sylvia Thomas, and produced by Chelsea Davis. Our executive producers are Palo Mottola and Joe Crosby, and our presenting sponsor this season is Subaru. As always, we appreciate when you subscribe, rate and review the show. Wherever you listen, we read all of the reviews. Some of them are really funny, and when they make me laugh out loud, that is just an extra bonus. Wherever you are in the world, please remember some of the best adventures often happen when you follow your wildest ideas.